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endeavor to secure to themselves the trade of the new colonies, especially those of Africa, before the English and Germans get their own cottons introduced to such an extent that a change in the commercial habits of the people of the colonies will be difficult.

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*The End of Villainage in England.* By THOMAS WALKER PAGE.

(Published by the Macmillan Company for the American Economic Association), New York, 1900. 8vo, pp. 99.

IN this interesting and instructive contribution to English economic history any discussion of its merits will largely be concerned with the author's main argument: that the Black Death was the chief agency in putting an end to villainage in England (pp. 48-65, with accompanying tables). The Black Death having figured so often and so prominently as an economic factor, it might be of interest to see how far in this case at least, this much honored theory holds good. Mr. Page points out, that by the tremendous loss of life, labor became very dear, money as it were became relatively cheap; and as an inducement to the surviving villains to stay, or to new villains to supplant them the lords offered commutation of predial service into a fixed money rent. To some students of this question, however, the crux of the change in the status of the villain lies in the fact that the villain had an opportunity to go away and stay away, not primarily in the conditions caused by the effects of the Black Death. The plague settled matters so to speak, but the causes for its succeeding in settling them lay elsewhere. Of course, Mr. Page has had to do with accounts from the large estates, records (which by the way are not at everybody's disposal); what they say, they say, and whatever is not in them, one has no right to look for. They clearly say that labor became exceedingly scarce after the plague and one is bound to pay attention to this. But provided that the reports of which Mr. Page speaks concern the year 1348-9 and not a number of years, such as one should suppose, it appears very strange indeed, that during so short a term, one year, "meadows should relapse into their former condition of swamp and fen," etc. (p. 50). For such a condition years are needed, to say the least, repeated and prolonged disasters, not one only. The suggestion may be permitted that the disheartened writer of accounts

must have penned his words under the cloud of general dread and misgiving for the future rather than pictured the true state of the domain. For the moral effect of the plague must have been far greater than the physical. The scarcity of laborers appears a fact not to be disputed; but on the other side, whatever the plague or plagues did towards thinning out the rural population, one cannot escape the thought that it had suffered losses by migration beforehand. The movement of changing domicile and occupation, which is always going on more or less perceptibly even within the supposed stable agricultural classes, must have effected changes invisible to us at this distance of time. The surplus gradually shifting off into the towns, to the coast or to the wars (and these three were all factors of importance in the economic life of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), must have told on the never thickly populated rural districts. In such cases elsewhere than in England the current of social and economic unrest by degrees effected other more stable layers, the farms became depopulated and "wilderness" came to reign where meadows were before. In England, let us say, the plague increased or helped to emphasize this "neglect written large in the landscape" mainly because there was then so little hope of having younger members of a household step into the duties of the older, since *all* had either decamped or died. The migration of serfs and free towards the northeast of Germany from Saxony and adjacent parts during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is a proof of the existence of causes for depopulation besides that of the Black Death or disasters in general. And our own mortgage-ridden New England farmer of today can, with certain allowances, serve as a modern instance.

That the Black Death did much towards changing conditions of free and unfree, especially in countries where the gaps in population could not easily be filled, because no layer ready and eager to fill the space left open—this, I think, is also beyond dispute. The study of plagues, as far as our scanty material allows, will show this. But the same study will also show that no sudden calamity of such a nature can effect a permanent change of importance, like the change from villinage to copyhold, if previous causes have not prepared for this change. It could hardly be shown, for example, that a great fire had depopulated a city unless there had been also previous causes at work (*cf.* the fire in London in 1666). The villain deserting his holding—where shall he flee unless there be a place waiting for him and

possessing such marked contrast to his former life that the enticement is great enough to persuade the slow worker of fields to break the customary bonds? Trade, industry, and warfare have always acted as a powerful stimulus upon the slumbering migratory instincts of the country population, and the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are the times, when this stimulus exercised its most potent influence and the chances were the best for the lower classes gravitating into freedom and fortune.

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A. M. WERGELAND.

*Der Arbeiterschutz bei Vergebung öffentlicher Arbeiten und Lieferungen.* (Bericht des k. k. arbeitsstatistischen Amtes über die auf diesem Gebiete in den europäischen und überseeischen Industriestaaten unternommenen Versuche und bestehenden Vorschriften.) Wien: Kaiserlich-königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1900. 8vo, pp. x + 163.

WITHIN a score of years an essentially new agency for the protection of workmen against possible hardship at the hands of their employers has come into use in many parts of Europe and America. The control over industry which the state exercises as a sovereign authority has come to be supplemented by its power as a consumer, for, like other consumers (like the "Consumers' League," for instance), the state or municipality may prescribe conditions as to the labor by which its wants are supplied—letting contracts for printing, army supplies, building, etc., only to persons willing to grant to their workmen advantages stipulated in the contracts.

This power has been employed for purposes ranging widely from the care of the laborers' health to the regulation of their wages or hours of daily service. Its rightfulness as to many of these purposes is generally conceded, even where the doctrine of free contract between laborers and employers has been held most strongly. Dispute centers now chiefly about the regulation of wages and hours of labor, and in a large part of the European world the question as to these points has not merely been raised, but answered; and it has become an established principle that in letting contracts the public authority is to be employed frankly as an instrument for influencing wages to the advantage of the wage-earner. Employers have frequently favored the insertion of a wages-minimum in government contracts as a restraint upon